

THE UNPREDICTABLE NATURE OF THE MISSING PUZZLE PIECE OF DEMOCRACY: THE AMERICAN VOTER

Omar D. Nader (Dr. Brian S. Vargus), Department of Political Science, Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis, Indianapolis, IN 46202

The electoral behavior of the American voter has been one of the most intriguing subjects of study for many academics and scholars. There have been numerous attempts to explain voting patterns through diverse measurements by examining the levels of political sophistication, political efficacy, political awareness, and other core concepts. For this project, the focus is on Presidential elections by investigating the research on the various models and factors on voting behavior such as: Rational Choice Theory, issue salience, The Michigan Model, prospective vs. retrospective voting, pocketbook vs. "sociotropic" voting, media influence, information levels, and the role of emotion. The latter brings in an irrational element; nevertheless, these will all be equally considered in order to capture a deeper insight into the American voter's participation in the political environment through civic engagement and the voter's personal social capital. Attention must be given to the various cleavages: gender, age, social class, religion, ethnicity, ideology, education level, economic standing, and location of residence, that divide the American electorate and how these "groups" are mobilized into taking action. The high volume of information available to voters makes it increasingly difficult to stay fully aware, critically analyze, and correctly assess the validity of the information because of the limitations of the voter's abilities and the constraint of time. Academics will claim that certain cues and heuristics are important for voters to pick up on just enough information to vote "correctly", or in their best interest. This will be a test of several statistical models of turnout levels based on the numerous existing explanations aiming at an integration of various factors into an overall model, analyzed through linear/ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions, in order to explain why people vote. The aim of this research will be to directly examine the American voter, through the analysis of the National Election Studies (NES) datasets using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), with a variety of variables in order to untangle the intertwined complexity of why the American democracy suffers from low levels of turnout in comparison to other post-industrial democracies in the world.